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MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS

UPON THE

SEVEN WORDS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

FROM THE CROSS,

BY

H. R. B.

✠

OXFORD:

PRIVATELY PRINTED BY THE SISTERHOOD OF

THE HOLY AND UNDIVIDED TRINITY.

A.D. MDCCCLXXX.

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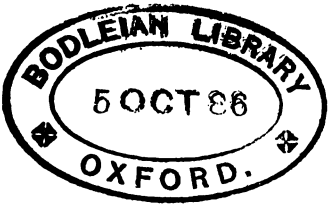
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S. BONAVENTURA'S PRAISE OF THE HOLY CROSS.

Soul that seekest for perfection,
Ever in thy recollection
  Fix the Cross by day and night:
On that mystery reflecting,
All those marvels recollecting,
  Make the Cross thy sole delight.

When thou wakest, when thou sleepest,
When thou laughest, when thou weepest;
  Whether thou have gain or loss:
When thou comest, when thou goest,
Whether grief or joy thou knowest,
  Hold within thy heart the Cross.

In all straits, in self-denial,
In each hard and heavy trial,
  Be the Cross thy only cure.
In their sorest tribulation
Pious hearts, for consolation,
  Find the Cross a refuge sure.

Gate of Paradise unfolding
Is the Cross, which Saints beholding
  Overcame their every foe.
Med'cine for the world's diseases,
By the Cross God's goodness pleases
  Mighty miracles to shew.

Know the Cross is man's salvation,
True and clear illumination,
  And the sweetness of the Soul.
In the Cross the blest have pleasure,
And the perfect find their treasure,
  Their rejoicing and their goal.

In the Cross is virtue's mirror,
Guide to safety, free from error;
  Hither faithful hearts aspire:
In the Cross the heirs of glory
Make their boast, and on its story
  Rest their hope and their desire.

Cross, most precious Burden bearing,
Robe of bloodred tincture wearing,
  Beauteous and most fruitful Tree!
'Neath that Robe our souls are cherished,
With celestial Dainties nourished,
  Through the Death that hallowed thee!

Warmest love of deep affection,
Honour passing man's conception,
On the saving Cross bestow:
Hither let thine utmost yearning,
And thy strongest efforts, turning,
From thy central being flow.

Heedfully thy thoughts securing,
Look on Christ the Cross enduring;
Grieve for Him with heart and voice.
Christian soul, Christ's Death bewailing,
Be thy sorrow never-failing:
Thus to grieve for Him rejoice.

Oh! what shame and degradation
Perfected His expiation,
When He came, the world to free!
Hunger sharp and thirst He knoweth,
Poor and destitute He goeth,
Even to the gallows tree.

When the Lord is apprehended,
And upon the Cross suspended,
Basely His disciples fly.
Then His Hands and Feet were riven,
Vinegar to drink was given
To the King of kings Most High.

vi.

On the Cross those Eyes were clouded
Round which blessed spirits crowded;
Paleness o'er that Face was spread:
From that Form so full of glory,
Stripped and naked, bruised and gory,
All the comeliness is fled.

For our guilt, for our offences,
Anguish poured through all His senses;
Torments seized on every vein:
Every tender Limb disjointed,
Torture was for Him appointed;
Stripes and wounds and fiercest pain.

Bleeding, agonizing, dying,
On the Cross, with tears and crying,
He at length gave up His Breath.
Now let sighs our bosoms heaving,
And our inmost heartstrings grieving,
Mourn God's only Son in death.

Crucified! my strength increasing,
Grant me with regret unceasing
All Thy woes and pangs to see.
On myself Thy woundprints tracing,
Thee upon the Cross embracing,
Bid me spend my life for Thee.

The following Meditations and Prayers may either be used consecutively, on Good Friday; or separately, one on each Friday in Lent; or at other times.

PRELIMINARY PRAYERS.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

PREVENT us, O Lord, in all our doings with Thy most gracious favour, and further us with Thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in Thee, we may glorify Thy holy Name, and finally by Thy mercy obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O LORD Jesu Christ, Son of the living God, set Thine holy Passion Cross and Death between Thy Judgment and our souls, both now and at the hour of death: and

moreover vouchsafe to grant unto the living mercy a grace, to the departed peace and rest, to Thy h Church unity and concord, and to us sinners life a joy everlasting; Who livest and reignest with t Father and the Holy Ghost, God world without e Amen. *(From the Sarum Pryme*

Our Father.

Then may be sung the First Stanza: and after e meditation the Stanza following.

FIRST STANZA.

See! His cruel foes surround Him,
And His people's sins have bound Him
Motionless upon the Tree.
Faithful soul bow down before Him;
And with bitter tears implore Him:
God and Man, He dies for thee.

(From the Spanish of Alfonzo Messia.)

First Word.

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.

✠

"HE is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."[1]

They were but few words that our Lord spoke before Caiaphas or Pilate: before Annas or Herod none at all, so far as we know. We hear no complaints, no reproaches, no petitions for Himself. "He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair!" "He set His Face as a flint:"[2] and surrendered Himself to suffer, without a groan and without a murmur.

[1] *Isaiah* liii. 7. [2] *Is.* l. 6. 7.

And now He has been nailed by the hands of sinners to the tree of shame. The last act of the tremendous Sacrifice has been begun. Jesus is hanging between the thieves: with the wounds fresh in His Hands and Feet: all His limbs strained upon the Cross: "He may tell all his bones."[3] His Frame quivers with torture, His Soul is oppressed with grief: His enemies have triumphed. They are rejoicing in His now certain death. His friends and followers are in despair. The brutal crowd are jeering round His Feet: the hardened soldiers are dividing the small gains which fall to their share for the performance of their inhuman office.

The Lord opens His mouth. He speaks and is no more dumb. And what does He say?

His first Word is not for Himself. It is not addressed to His Blessed Mother; to His beloved disciple. It is not a vindication of His power to lay down His life when He will, and to take it again, when the purpose of His death is accomplished. It is a prayer, an intercession.

We have in S. John[4] the great Eucharistic Prayer of our High Priest for His disciples, and for all believers to the end of time. Doubtless, we

[3] *Ps.* xxii. 17. [4] *S. John* xvii.

have there, expressed in words, the purpose of our Redeemer in offering Himself without spot to God. We may also hear in that deep utterance an earthly echo of that ineffable mediation which our ascended Saviour carries on within the veil; where He appears in the presence of God for us.[5]

But His first word upon the Cross is not for those whom He had chosen out of the world; nor for those who should believe on Him by their word: but for impenitent sinners. "He made intercession for the transgressors."[6] This is a true description of all mankind, for whom He died: but it is more particularly true of those for whom He prayed to the Father, at the commencment of His atoning sufferings, "Father forgive them."

If there is one duty more than another on which our Lord insists in His teaching; which He at least puts in a new light, if it was not altogether peculiar to Him: which he makes absolutely indispensable to salvation; it is the forgiveness of injuries.

The only petition of the Lord's Prayer on which He thought it necessary to comment was "Forgive us our trespasses: as we forgive them that trespass against us." "For (says He) if ye forgive men their

[5] *Heb.* ix. 24. [6] *Is.* liii. 12.

trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."[7]

Again in the parable of the unmerciful servant we have a terrible example of the doom of those who would exact the petty satisfaction due to them for injuries received; unmindful of the enormous debt which has been cancelled for them by the Blood of Christ. "His lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him." Which he never could. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."[8]

And yet again after the cursing of the barren fig tree, (He said) "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."[9]

It was on the Tuesday that He repeated this precept the last time: and on the Friday He Himself put it into practice.

[7] *S. Matt.* vi. 12. 14. 15. [8] *S. Matt.* xviii. 34. 35.
[9] *S. Mark* xi. 25. 26.

Our Master never gives us a command without Himself setting us the example. He said in His Sermon on the Mount "Pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." And here He did it. Let us then consider First, the example here proposed: and Secondly the way in which we may follow it.

No injuries could be greater or more undeserved than those which our Lord was now enduring.

He was a martyr to the truth. It was His goodness alone for which men hated Him, and for which they crucified Him.

I suppose there was not a single good or noble motive in any one of those numerous persons who had a hand in His Death, which contributed in any measure to bring about that dreadful crime.

The avarice and spite of Judas, the worldliness and envy of the priests, the self-satisfied hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the evil conscience and time-serving of Pilate, the fickleness of the multitude, the weakness of the disciples, are all too evident.

All that Jesus Himself could say for those for whom He prayed was, "They know not what they do."

Yet how much there was which they could not help knowing! They all knew perfectly well that He was innocent of any such seditious revolutionary designs

as they made the ground of their accusation before Pilate. Pilate soon saw that, and would have let Him go. But finally from motives of self-interest he consented to sacrifice the life of an innocent man.

Then as to the charge on which he was condemned by the Jewish council: because He made Himself the Christ, the Son of God.

All His course on earth had been directed to this end, to show that He was the Divine Son, the Word and Image of the Father: and it was only those whose eyes were closed to moral beauty through their own internal deformity, who loved darkness rather than light, and who refused to own what they could not but feel to be true, who could construe His witness to His own claims, and to the claims of God through Him, into blasphemy. Thus no injury, no insult could be greater than that which was done to our Blessed Lord in His condemnation.

And then think what a death it was to which He was condemned! Could anything be more dreadfully cruel? more revolting? To be nailed alive upon a piece of wood, and so left to die!

This had just taken place, when our Lord made this prayer.

But who was it that He prayed for?

No names, no kinds of men are specified.

The prayer clearly looks to those that crucified Him. It follows immediately upon S. Luke's narrative of the Crucifixion. "When they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father forgive them."[1]

We may perhaps justly say that the persons uppermost in our Blessed Lord's mind were the soldiers: the brutal unthinking instruments of more malicious enemies. The verse goes on "And they parted His raiment and cast lots."[2] 'They' were the soldiers.

But who is there that is left out? Who did not help to crucify the Son of God? And for whom did He not intercede? Surely we must include all. The Priests, the Pharisees, the people; Pilate Herod, Judas. Our Lord's human forgiveness extended to them all. His Divine Will would have had all men to be saved. And He intreated His Father for them all. "He made intercession for the transgressors." And many doubtless were converted by that prayer. Not long after we read that "A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."[3]

But without endeavouring to pry into the counsels of God, let us think a little more of the Divine self-

[1] *S. Luke* xxiii. 33. 34. [2] *v* 34. [3] *Acts* vi. 7.

forgetfulness of our Blessed Lord in praying at this time for His deadly enemies.

To die unjustly, and that by such a dreadful death, might seem enough to fill the mind even of the most perfect man at such a moment. If He had then said "Father not my will but Thine be done," we might have thought that the utmost limit of submission and self-sacrifice. But as it is, self has vanished altogether. It is for the sins of men and not for His own sufferings that He grieves. It is for the consequence of their sins to themselves that He fears. He uses His effectual intercession to obtain remission: the gift of repentance; and the crown of repentance, which is forgiveness. And He makes for them the only plea He can. He cannot say, They have not hurt Me, He cannot say, They meant well. He cannot say, Their sin is small. But He can say of all, They know not what they do. No sinner ever did or ever will know to the full what he is doing when he sins. And that He does say, "They know not what they do."

The soldiers did not know whom they were crucifying. Certainly a very meek and gentle sufferer, who made no resistance. A Lamb in the midst of wolves. But they only obeyed orders: and had probably

ceased to care, if ever they did care, for the torture they inflicted on their fellow creatures.

Pilate felt a mysterious awe before the King whose kingdom was not of this world. He found in Him no fault at all. But he did not know that he was crucifying the Lord of Glory. His whole mind was set on his own safety.

The Priests had shut their eyes: and so they did not know that Jesus of Nazareth was the King of Israel, the Lord of hosts. They would not have crucified *Him* with their eyes open. And so in whatever degree each one of them or each one of us was ignorant of what we were doing when we sinned, in that degree and to that extent did our crucified Saviour urge our ignorance in extenuation of our guilt, and join with that plea of justice the more prevailing request of His most merciful desire.

For what could that plea avail for us in justice? If we did not know all, we all, and they all, knew enough to know that we were doing wrong.

But it was for wrong doers that the Saviour died.

For wrong doers that He made His first and widest appeal upon the Cross.

Let us then consider how His example applies to us.

It is no doubt, very hard always to forgive. We

probably do not find this out at first. We can be very magnificent, and forgive with great readiness and completeness, when we are not hurt. But when an injury comes home to us, when we find that it is irreparable; when our confidence is so shaken that it can never return; if our familiar friend whom we trusted has laid great wait for us, or he that did eat of our bread hath lifted up his heel against us (as Judas' treachery is described in the prophetic Psalm)[3] then to say from our heart "Father forgive them" is hard to flesh and blood.

We knew that proverbial saying, "I may forgive but I can never forget:" which is too often a transparent euphemism for not forgiving at all. The sense of injury remains. The estrangement from the person who has done the injury remains. Forgiveness is certainly not complete: though if the effort to make it so continues, it may be accepted for the time, and may become so.

But it is hard to get rid of our self-assertion and our self-importance: and these are what stand in the way of the forgiveness of injuries, as of so many other duties.

We may suggest two remedies; the principle of our Lord's parable of the unmerciful servant,

[3] *Ps.* xli. 9.

"Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?"[4] And the example of our Lord Himself; who though He had no sins to be forgiven, yet under the most cruel and unprovoked wrong that man could suffer prayed for His murderers: as His first Martyr did after His example.

This shews us specially that what we ought to seek is the real good of those who have injured us. If they repent and ask our pardon we must forgive them. If they are hardened we must still sincerely desire their good, in every way. We must pray for them. We must invite their good will. We must, as in all things else, put ourselves out of the way: not thinking in our own hearts that we ought to be the first consideration, that our claims must first be satisfied; but "let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus:"[5] Who was so followed by His Apostle that he could also propound himself as an example: speaking of himself as "not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."[6]

Unselfishness is the root of charity, and to forgive injuries is one of the precious fruits of charity.

[4] *S. Matt.* xviii. 33. [5] *Phil.* ii. 5. [6] 1 *Cor.* x. 33.

STANZA.

GUILTY fears my heart appalling,
Countless sins for vengeance calling,
Such the weary load I bear.
Hark! the dying Jesus pleadeth;
Yes, for me He intercedeth;
Spare me Lord, in mercy spare.

℣. We adore Thee O Lord Jesu Christ, and bless Thee. ℟. For by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Act of Contrition.

O MY God I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee above all things, and I am heartily sorry for the sins by which I have offended Thee.

Prayer.

O LORD Jesu Christ, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, Who didst meekly endure for us the most unjust sentence of condemnation, and when Thou wast nailed to the Cross didst in Thine agonies intercede for those that crucified Thee, saying, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do:" be Thou our Advocate with the Father, now and in the hour of death; that we may obtain perfect remission and for-

giveness of all our sins and offences, known or unknown; and grace to forgive as we would be forgiven: and grant that we may never more wound Thee by our transgressions, but may have strength to crucify the flesh, and utterly to abolish the whole body of sin, through Thy merits and intercession, Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God world without end. Amen.

Second Word.

TO DAY SHALT THOU BE WITH ME IN PARADISE.

✠

OF all the sweet and gracious words which proceeded out of the mouth of Jesus our Lord, and they were many: there is none sweeter or more gracious than that which He spoke to the thief upon the cross.

It is told of that great and profound thinker, and at the same time humble Christian, Bishop Butler, that when he was lying on his deathbed, he said, speaking of our Lord: I am sure that He is the Saviour of the world; but how can I know that He will be a Saviour to me? To which his Chaplain replied, in the words of the Lord Himself, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."[1]—Oh!

[1] *S. John* vi. 37.

this is comfortable !" was the next exclamation which was heard from the pillow of the dying man.

Now in our Lord's second Word upon the Cross, we see such an example, in actual fact, of this most comfortable truth, that we cannot imagine a case to which it is not applicable. He did not cast out the dying robber, when he came to Him in his last hours. There was no delay, no uncertainty in the promise. Verily I say unto thee: To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise!

We have no reason to think that the robber was any thing more than an ordinary criminal. A man probably with little education, brought up in familiarity with fraud and violence: driven it might be, by want or bravado into some extraordinary outrage, some audacious act of pillage or bloodshed; and so consigned to the most horrible and ignominious kind of death, for an example and a terror to all such characters. There were two such malefactors led to be put to death with our Saviour: the Jewish rulers thus endeavouring, as it would seem, to make His case appear like theirs; and to secure by this malicious device, that He should in popular estimation, be "numbered" (as the prophet had foretold) "with the transgressors."[2]

[2] *Is* liii. 12.

But how different was the conduct of the two! So different that they are justly taken as representatives of those two classes of persons, eternally distinct, who shall be set on the right and on the left hand of the Judge in the Great Day.

For the King had even now ascended His Throne. The Cross is not only the seat from which as the great Teacher He instructs the world, especially how to die: the Altar on which as the true Priest He offers sacrifice for sinners: it is also the Judgment Seat from which He separates between the sheep and the goats; and discerns the thoughts and intents of men's hearts. "There God is reigning from the Tree."

S. Mark says, "They that were crucified with Him reviled Him." And S. Matthew's account is similar. Some have thought these two Evangelists to be speaking vaguely: and that we are to understand their assertion as really applying only to the impenitent thief. But it seems more in keeping with the minute accuracy of the histories of the Passion which we have in the Gospels, to suppose that the words are strictly true: and that after they had all been left hanging in their agonies upon their crosses, the robber, to whom before He died Christ made His gracious promise, had taken part in the mocking of the chief priests and

scribes and elders, who said "He saved others himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel let Him now come down from the Cross;" and had with his companion, "cast the same in his teeth:"[3] that is, used similar upbraidings; as the impenitent thief is related to have done by S Luke, "saying, if Thou be Christ," or as it is still more graphically in some of the most ancient manuscripts "Thou art the Christ art Thou not"? "Save Thyself and us."[4]

Even in death, the malicious jeering spirit, which is such a sad and certain proof of the absence of the love or fear of God, was strong within the soul of this bad man. He sought to find relief from his pain in causing pain to another: and taunted his fellow sufferer even in the very face of death.

We may notice also the object of his hypothetical mocking request, "If thou be Christ save Thyself and us:" that is, from pain and death in this world. In wicked men this world and the things of this world are uppermost to the last. To seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness is a mark of grace. And we see it in the repentant thief, "Lord remember me when Thou comest into thy kingdom." He looks beyond death, and makes a petition for a place in

[3] *S. Matt.* xxvii. 42. 44. [4] *S. Luke* xxiii. 39.

Christ's remembrance, when He should return in power and glory.

In this he seems to be far in advance of the Apostles themselves. Two of them had asked to sit one on Christ's right hand and the other on His left hand in His Kingdom.[5] But when they saw Him in the power of His enemies, seized and bound as an offender against the law, "then all the disciples forsook Him and fled."[6]

But the thief, though he beheld Him crucified, still believed Him to be a King. Believed, there seems no doubt, that His Kingdom should survive death: and that He should have it in His power to aid the poor perishing sinner in a world beyond the grave.

"Lord remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." (The Greek in most manuscripts is *in* and not *into*, and there does not seem to be any sufficient reason for retaining the 'into.' *To* by some means has found its way into the Latin, and so probably into the English.)

Here was the prayer of faith; and that no common faith: to believe in the future kingdom of our Lord, when He was dying: and to it came no common answer. "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

[5] *S. Matt.* xx. 21. [6] *S. Matt.* xxvi. 56.

Oh! what a blessed prospect! To be with Jesus is Paradise itself.

"Heaven is dear Lord where'er Thou art,
Oh never then from me depart:
For to my soul 'tis Hell to be
But for one moment void of Thee."

Such is Bishop Ken's devout aspiration.[7] And surely this most comfortable word must have revived the spirit of the dying thief, so that the cross itself must have been to him an easier deathbed, than the most tender care and the most attentive nursing can secure for anyone who is not fully at peace with God through Christ.

What a blessed thing to be so near to Jesus! Together on the Cross: together in the world of spirits! "Where I am, there shall also my servant be."[8] So our Lord had promised in general: so He assured this late converted malefactor that it should be with him; on the day that "He poured out His soul unto death, and bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."[9]

We must look upon the robber's conversion as a miracle of Divine Grace, the firstfruits of the triumphs of redeeming love. "Thy pitiful eye, O Lord Jesu,

[7] *Midnight Hymn.* [8] *S. John* xii. 26. [9] *Is.* liii. 12.

looked upon him, and thou calledst him with an inward calling to repentance." And he by grace obeyed the calling.

What were the means that led him to fix his faith upon the Lamb of God, we cannot perhaps say. He might have known something of our Saviour's character and teaching. He might have heard more or less of His trial before Pilate.

He would probably be a witness of His meek submission, when "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter;" and would hear His prayer for His murderers when He first opened His mouth upon the Cross: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

He would see the superscription of His accusation in the title on the Cross, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews:" and he accepts in good earnest the writing which Pilate put there in contempt for Jesus, and in derision of the Jews. He turned to the meek sufferer beside him and said (as seems to be the true reading:) "Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy Kingdom."

The King of the Jews was as yet outside His Kingdom; so He was poor and despised: but the time would come when He would have received it and would return; and then he hoped He would remember him.

But this was not the first sign that he had given of his change of heart. He began with a famous confession of his own misdeeds and our Saviour's innocence; prefaced by a rebuke to his companion for his heartless taunts and cruel mockery, an offence against the natural dictates of humanity and the first principles of right action.

"Dost not thou fear God (now in thy last moments) seeing that thou art under the same sentence of death (with Him whom thou upbraidest)? And (as to us) we are justly sentenced (to the death of felons) for we are receiving (as a recompence) things worthy of the deeds we wrought: but this Man (whom thou revilest) did nothing (at all) amiss."[o]

Here we have an accumulation of the evidences of true conversion. The fear of God appealed to as a fundamental motive; the sense of justice in our dealings with our fellow men: a faithful rebuke of a former comrade for overbearing insolence: confession of guilt; acquiescence in punishment; acknowledgment of Christ's righteousness, and a firm resolution to take His part: followed by the definite request, so humble, yet so full of faith in His power and goodness: "Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom."

[o] *S. Luke* xxiii. 40. 41.

Oh that we might follow the example of this happy thief, in his simple acknowledgment of his own unworthiness; in his profound humility, and in his undoubting confidence in the power and love of Jesus!

That we might take into our mouths the words which an ancient devout writer puts into them: "I am a most wicked robber, who have ofttimes slain my own and others' souls: Behold I adore Thee, whom that thief adored, and I pray as he prayed, "Lord remember me, when thou comest into thy Kingdom."[1]

We see here the conditions of salvation. How it is a free gift; and yet how there is a moral fitness in those on whom it is conferred. This robber could not in any sense be said to have earned or merited eternal life. He had been called at the eleventh hour. No time remained for him to work. Yet he gave evidence of faith and hope and charity. He abhorred his sins. He accepted his punishment as just: and he threw himself entirely on the free grace and sovereign clemency of his Redeemer. And how ample was the response! "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." There was to be no delay: no distance between the Saviour and the pardoned sinner.

[1] *Ludolph of Saxony: in his Life of Christ. Pt.* ii. *Ch.* lxiii.

"Give me a place at Thy saints' feet,
Or some fallen angel's vacant seat."

That would suffice for any of us. But this last comer into the kingdom of heaven is taken by the Lord Himself to be His companion, to carry the news of His atoning Death into the regions of the dead, and to accompany Him into that blessed place, the Paradise of God, the garden of delights, in which those who "depart hence in the Lord, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity." In Paradise, in Abraham's bosom; reclining with Patriarchs, and Prophets, and the spirits of other just men made perfect, at a never ending banquet of celestial joys: feeding on the hidden manna, enjoying the society of the disembodied Soul of Jesus, during that mysterious interval in which He descended into Hell; and afterwards, we may surely believe, refreshed with such an unveiling of His glorious power and goodness, that although the souls at rest still look forward to their perfect consummation and bliss both in body and soul: yet while we are at home in the body we are by comparison absent from the Lord: and it is far better to depart and to be with Christ:[2] being thus absent from the body but present with the Lord.

[2] *2 Cor.* v. 6. 8. *Phil.* i. 23.

Here He is known by faith; there by some clearer revelation: in Heaven we shall behold Him face to face.

How sweet the whisper to the departing soul! "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Who would not wish to hear it in the hour of death? Let us then follow the footsteps of this penitent thief, not in the lateness, but in the genuineness of his repentance!

It is a wise comment of Matthew Henry, upon this narrative: "Though it is certain that true repentance is never too late, it is certain that late repentance is seldom true." This thief was called at the eleventh hour. We have been called earlier in the day. Let us not refuse to bear the burden and to endure the heat.

There is everything to render faith easier to us than it could be to him.

Our sufferings are usually light.

But whether light or heavy let us take them patiently.

There is one other lesson we may learn from this most reassuring narrative: that those to whom our Saviour is most gracious are not exempted from things which we regard as terrible and most distressing. It

was through his death being hastened by his having his legs broken that our Lord's promise to the good thief was fulfilled to the letter: and that his spirit was that day released, and went to Paradise.

Let us then not shrink from any temporal afflictions which God in His wise Providence may lay upon us.

Let us hang on our cross beside our crucified Redeemer, disdaining all idea of real inherent merit of our own: turning to Him as our only hope, and absolute security: and looking up to Him with humble confidence let us prefer our petition; "Lord, Jesu, remember me, when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom."

So when we pass the veil which divides this world from the realm of disembodied spirits, we may hope to feel beneath our failing feet the Everlasting Arms; and to hear Him speaking to our parting soul: "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

STANZA.

When the hour of death o'ertakes me,
When each earthly hope forsakes me,
And the spirit wings its flight;
Let not Satan's wiles ensnare me,
In Thy loving Arms upbear me,
Safely to the Realms of light.

The ℣. ℟. & Act of contrition are repeated after each stanza.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesu Christ, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life, Who when Thou wast hanging upon the Cross didst try the hearts and search out the spirits, and unto the penitent thief, acknowledging his own sinfulness and confessing Thee, didst promise mercy and salvation in the world to come, saying unto him, "To day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise:" have mercy upon us now and in the hour of death; that dying unto the world and to ourselves we may be wholly converted unto Thee: and whensoever Thou shalt command our souls to depart out of our bodies, grant that they may be carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom, that we may rest in peace until the Day of Judgment, and may have our part in the glorious Resurrection unto eternal life, through Thy merits Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, One God, world without end. Amen.

Third Word.

WOMAN BEHOLD THY SON! BEHOLD THY MOTHER.

✠

THE aged Simeon had forewarned the Blessed Virgin that even she should not escape that pain by which the hearts of the children of men are weaned from this transitory world, and turned to the pure love of God. "Yea a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also."[1] And surely this came to pass when she stood by the Cross of Jesus; and saw her Divine Son thus made a reproach to His enemies, a very scorn and derision to those that were round about Him. She might indeed then say with the Psalmist "My bones are smitten asunder as with a sword, while they say unto me, where is now thy God?"[2]

[1] *S. Luke* ii. 35. [2] *Ps.* xlii. 12. 13.

When she saw those holy limbs, which were her own flesh and blood, so cruelly mangled, and beheld her dear, her only Child, suffering such agonies, with no hope of life; well may it be said, that what she endured was more than martyrdom.

Yet she stood by the Cross of her Redeemer. We cannot perhaps say exactly how far she understood the purport of His words, so unintelligible to His Apostles; which He spake unto them saying: "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge Him and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again."[3]

Doubtless she pondered these things in her heart. She might be sustained by the knowledge that His sufferings were part of the Will of God concerning Him, and by the expectation of His Resurrection. Certainly she did not give way to weakness, or abandon herself to vain regrets or useless lamentations. But we may be sure her mother's heart was wrung with anguish. The mother and the Son each felt the other's pain. The Virgin was excruciated by her Son's

[3] *S. Luke* xviii. 31—33.

tortures; the Son of Man was deeply grieved and wounded by His mother's sorrows.

And so he opened His mouth to comfort her. His hour was now come. When He wrought miracles, and manifested forth His glory, it was not for her to direct or restrain His power. He would not at her bidding leave the work His Father had given Him to do. But when He was crucified through the weakness that He had assumed, He would acknowledge His obligation and perform His duty to that most blessed among women, from whom He had taken our frail nature.[4]

He did not say 'Mother:' For that endearing word, under those circumstances, would have been a fresh stab to her bleeding heart. Just as we must think that Isaac's words, in his simplicity, when he said "My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the Lamb for a burnt offering," must have given fresh poignancy to Abraham's grief, that he should be called upon to part with such a son. And so our Lord said, "Woman, (a word which is often translated by Lady, or some other title of honour: an ordinary, but perfectly respectful way of addressing her:) Behold,

[4] *S. John* ii. 3. 4. *S. Mark* iii. 21. 31—35.

thy son." She did indeed behold her Son: and it was that sight that was the cause of all her grief.

But soon as He knew, and as she knew, He would be hid from her eyes. And so He finds her another son, the best He could: the dearest of His friends. The disciple whom He loved, which also leaned on His breast at supper[5] the night before, was standing by. And to him the Lord pointed His desolate mother for her stay, her protection, her consolation; in what was indeed her inconsolable affliction. See! there is thy son that is to be! And then looking to His beloved disciple, He completes the link which was to bind them together for the future. "Behold! there is thy mother." And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

Perhaps he at once led her away from the sight of further horrors: and then came back again himself to see the end. This would help to account for what we read in S. Matthew and S. Mark, that at the time our Lord expired upon the Cross "there were women looking on afar off; among whom was Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, and Salome."[6] The Blessed Virgin Mary is not mentioned, and the others had removed to a distance.

[5] *S. John* xiii. 23. [6] *S. Mark* xv. 40.

At all events from that time he paid to her the respect due from a son to his mother. He loved honoured and succoured her, as though it were the debt of nature. And John was to Mary as a son. When her own true Son was exalted to the right hand of God, His beloved disciple was a dear pledge of His neverfailing care: a constant memorial of His love in death. And at this bitterest hour he was to her some support: a companion in tribulation, an associate in resignation and submission to the great Will of God.

In this, as in the two previous sayings from the Cross we observe two things. The dignity and composure of our Lord, as He was offering up His voluntary sacrifice: and that love, that real charity, which seeketh not her own: from which indeed His sacrifice proceeded. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."[7] So although the soul of our Saviour was full of trouble, so that He said by His Prophet "I stick fast in the deep mire where no ground is: I am come into deep waters, so that the floods run over me,"[8] yet did He even then take thought for others and not for Himself. After interceding for the transgressors, and promising Paradise to the penitent thief, He made provision for

[7] *Cant.* viii. 7. [8] *Ps.* lxix. 2.

the earthly wants of His Mother: and in so doing left His most precious legacy to the best beloved of His disciples.

It was indeed an honour for John to succeed to his Master's place: and to have the Mother of God for his own mother. It was the parting gift of his most bounteous Lord: yet bestowed, like all His gifts, where it was most fitting. John's deep intense affection for God's Word incarnate, his contemplative spiritual character, his angelic purity, made him the most suitable protector and companion for her who had known in herself the mystery of the Incarnation, who loved her God as her own Child, and adored her Son as her Creator: and although it was not S. John but S. Luke who was chosen to record those secret revelations of Nazareth and the hill-country of Judea: we cannot doubt that to the Eagle of the New Testament there were also shewn by her means visions of sublime import, concerning the first rising of the Sun of Righteousness.

Having the Blessed Virgin for his mother, he became as it were the brother of his Lord. So good is it for us to stand by the side of our suffering Saviour. It makes Him our brother. For He says, "whosoever shall do

the Will of God, the same is my brother and my sister and mother."[9] And certainly there is no pattern, no incentive, no help to obedience, like the Cross.

When we hear that there stood by the Cross of Jesus His mother, we cannot help going back to those first scenes of the Gospel, when the Saviour of the world was nursed, an unconscious Infant, in a Maiden's arms. And now that blessed Maid beheld Him die. Nature must demand that we should sympathize with her. Her very standing by the Cross shews her extraordinary strength of character. Our Lord's words bear testimony to the reality and the permanence of that affection which as Man He bore to His sole parent. He takes no notice of the other sorrowing women; not even of Mary Magdalene, to whom He appeared first after He rose from the dead.[o] He speaks to His mother before He speaks to John. It is for her benefit especially that He puts John in His own place towards her.

John had left father and mother that he might follow Jesus; and he received from Him now an hundredfold in this present life in having the mother of his Lord entrusted to his care. So says S. Augustine. But there seems to be no trace in the Fathers,

[9] *S. Mark* iii. 35. [o] *S. Mark* xvi. 9.

of that conclusion which is drawn from this touching passage of the Gospel by the later writers. It is not even glanced at by S. Thomas Aquinas in his Catena Aurea. That is the idea that S. John in this case stood for all the faithful; and that the Blessed Virgin was thus assigned to them all to be their comforter patroness and guardian: their helper in all times of trouble; their protection in life, in death, and after death.[1]

It would seem as if those who first started such a notion had lost sight both of the real Divinity and of the real Humanity of Jesus Christ. Of His real Divinity, since they would represent Him as insufficient for the supply of every need of every soul; and would associate with Him, in His peculiar office, one who has no share in the Divine Essence: of His true Humanity; in that they do not regard Him as one "that can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;"[2] but must needs put the Mother of mercies, as they call His Blessed Mother, between perishing souls, and that infinite Love, "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was made man; and was also crucified for us."

[1] *Ludolph of Saxony: in his Life of Christ. Pt.* ii. *Ch.* lxiii. [2] *Heb.* iv. 15.

The contrast between the Primitive and the Medieval writers, in their treatment of this Third Word of our Blessed Lord's, is so marked, that it is but right to notice it: though on the whole we should certainly wish at this present time to regard it as a theme for devout meditation, and not as a subject for controversial disputation.

By this word Our Lord set His seal to the enduring sanctity of human relations and affections. In the midst of his agonies, and in His last hours, He recognised the claims of His Mother, and of His friend. He set an example of obedience, so far as it could concern Him, to that command which He had given before His Incarnation, on Mount Sinai: and which He had vindicated during His Ministry from the glosses of the Pharisees: "Honour thy father and thy mother."

He also singled out for the further discharge of that most grateful office, the man who had in life been nearest to His Heart: thus sanctioning and approving those special attachments, and more intimate friendships, for which no regulations are provided in the Gospel, which nevertheless belong to pure human nature; and are at once permitted and sanctified by the example of our Lord Himself. If there are no precepts in the Holy Scriptures (at least in the New

Testament) touching friendship, there is Christ's example, which is all-sufficient.

From it we learn two things. First that private affection is not to warp our public conduct, or interfere with the exercise of general charity. We never find the other disciples complaining that any partiality was shewn to James and John: though we do find them moved with indignation against those two brethren, because they asked for special eminence in Christ's kingdom. Such places, our Lord said, were not His to give except to those for whom in God's just judgment, they were prepared. What our Lord did grant to personal friendship was that special tenderness and peculiar nearness which could only belong to a few, and which did not interfere with what was possible for all.

Secondly our Lord would let no personal feeling stand in the way of His obedience to His Father's Will. This was His reason for His first apparent disregard of His Mother's feelings: when she found Him after three days in the Temple. This motive was supreme with Him on the Cross: and His Mother's anguish could no more prevail with Him than His own agonies, to induce Him to come down from the Cross, or to decline for Himself one drop of

that bitter cup which God in His mysterious Providence had put into His hands to drink. And so He was parted from her again, till the third day: and what a bitter parting for them both! He was the only Son of His Mother, and she was a widow. His compassion did all He could for her, consistently with the purposes of God: teaching us to be tender and considerate; most of all to parents: but there He stopped: shewing us, (as S. Chrysostom says,) that even as we ought not even to know our parents, if they are contrary to us in spiritual things: but to be like the tribe of Levi, whom Moses commends in his blessing, as one who in his zeal for the Lord, "said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children:"[3] so, if they prove no obstacle, we ought to award them everything which is fitting.

Relative duties are not to be set aside upon the plea of special devotion to God. This was the Pharisaic principle of the Corban:[4] though it was probably often used as a mere pretext for the neglect of parents. So on the other hand no wishes or wants of parents or other friends are to be allowed to interfere with the real commands of God: or to prevent the

[3] *Deut.* xxxiii. 9. [4] *S. Mark* vii. 9—13.

discharge of any duty incident to the state or office to which God has called us.

Lastly we see here another element in our Divine Lord's voluntary sufferings. He was wounded in His affections; no less than in His blessed hands and feet.

No infirmity of temper, no lingering resentment, no hardening of the heart from growing worldliness or gathering cares, no diversion of His love to other channels, had ever dulled the freshness of His filial love to Mary. For thirty years they had lived in daily intimacy: sharing the same duties hopes and joys. Her whole heart was fixed on Him. Her expectations centred in His future life. No doubt she had suffered many a pang before He was delivered into the hands of His enemies. But this was the sharpest pang of all. And this was a bitter sorrow to the Holy Jesus.

Here was another of the deadly fruits of sin. Sin called for the death of the Just friend of sinners. "By His stripes we are healed."[5] His Death is our life. But those stripes went to the heart of His tender Mother: and the necessity for her suffering was a fresh load on the bursting heart of Jesus.

Yet He would undergo it all for our Redemption.

[5] *Is.* liii. 5.

His love looked beyond time and sense. It triumphed over the dearest ties and tenderest affections of His pure Human Nature. He sacrificed His filial love, His tender friendship: and chose that His Mother should be bereaved and desolate, and His beloved disciple left to mourn, that so the ransom for their souls and our's might not be wanting.

Let us try to enter into His griefs, that they may purify our hearts: and let us adore in silence His inexhaustible goodness, which led Him into such depths of suffering; not only in every fibre of His Body; but in every recess and faculty of His Human Soul and Spirit.

STANZA.

By the mystic Fount bestowing
Grace Divine, from Jesus flowing,
  Thou hast made me once Thine own.
By that priceless gift sustain me;
From each evil thought restrain me;
  Fix my heart on Thee alone.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesu Christ, the Word of God, Who art the Root and Offspring of David, the Seed of the woman, the only Son of Thy Virgin Mother, Who

when Thine hour was come, didst think upon her in the midst of Thy pains, and didst commit her to the care of Thy beloved disciple, saying unto her, "Woman behold thy Son!" and to the disciple "Behold thy mother!" grant we beseech Thee, that we may never make light of those to whom Thou hast given authority over us, nor neglect those whom thou hast entrusted to our charge; but that obeying in all things Thy blessed Will we may be joined unto the company of Thy Saints, and may evermore receive the benefit of their prayers, and be comforted by the fellowship of their affection, through Thy merits, Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, One God world without end. Amen.

Fourth Word.

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?

✠

WHENEVER our Lord specially humbled himself and stooped to the wants and weaknesses of human nature, there were always some accompanying signs of His Divine power and greatness: and on the other hand, whenever any special proof was given of the Divine Presence in the Man Christ Jesus it was invariably joined with some convincing token of the reality of His Incarnation.

When Mary brought forth her infant Son, the shepherds were informed of the Birth of Christ the Lord by an Angel; the Magi were brought to worship Him by the appearance of a star. His life was then sought, and He was forced to flee: but His flight

was directed by a warning from God. At His Baptism a Voice came from Heaven declaring that He was God's beloved Son: and immediately He was exposed to the Temptation.

At His Transfiguration, Moses and Elias, who were to give place to Him, spoke with Him of His approaching Passion: which He had just before announced to Peter and the Apostles; when by the mouth of their spokesman they had confessed Him to be the Christ of God. Before He raised Lazarus from the grave, He wept. Many signs and wonders and evident fulfilments of prophecy attended His lowly entry into Jerusalem; His Agony, His Trial, and His Crucifixion; so far as we have already followed it.

We are now to see Him plunged in the deepest and most mysterious anguish. But before He discloses it the sun turns away his face; as though unable to gaze upon the shame and ignominy of his Creator. Light is withdrawn from the face of the earth: for the Sun of Righteousness is setting in Blood; the powers of darkness have for the moment triumphed; the wicked, in whose hearts the light of God is quenched, have, as they think, put out for ever that Divine clearness which was a standing reproach to their perverseness: the light of faith has faded from

the souls of Christ's disciples: "for all the disciples forsook Him and fled:"[1] and the well-beloved of the Father, the Son of His Love, who doth always such things as please Him, feels Himself deserted and left to perish, without one ray of comfort in His desolate afflicted soul.

All is dark with Him. He is overwhelmed with misery.

For three hours has the darkness brooded over the earth. The midday heavens have been overspread with blackness. His Bodily agonies have increased. The wounds in His Hands and Feet, the furrows on His Back, the punctures of the thorny crown upon His Head, have all had time to inflame; He is gasping for Breath: All His Bones are out of joint: there is not a limb or part of His Body which is at ease. His friends have mostly forsaken Him in their despair. He has made His last provision for the safety of His Mother: He has assured her and His beloved disciple of His affection to the last. The pain of this separation, both theirs and His, is in His Heart.

But there are there besides incomprehensible woes. He sees in their true colours the crimes which have brought Him to the Cross: the worldliness of the

[1] *S. Matt.* xxvi. 56.

Priests, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the brutality of the soldiers, the fickleness of the populace, the feebleness of the disciples. He sees also that seething mass of wickedness which had turned away the Face of God from His lost creatures upon earth. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."[2]

Those sins at which our hearts have sunk within us, from the thought of which even now we turn with a sickening feeling, and a prayer that God would remember them no more, but cast them all behind His Back, were everyone, in their full enormity, their native malignity, their unforgiven guilt, weighing upon the mind of Jesus: as He "gave His Life a ransom for many,"[3] and "by the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God."[4] The Prince of darkness, who attacked Him so fiercely and persistently in the wilderness, seeking if by any means he might obtain an entrance into His unsullied soul; the same evil spirits which came about Him like wolves in the garden of Gethsemane; were now, with redoubled malice, fastening upon the garment of His Humanity, and torturing His departing soul, with their fell darts and detestable suggestions.

The sense of failure misery and grief were in His

[2] *Is.* liii. 6. [3] *S. Matt.* xx. 28. [4] *Heb.* ix. 14.

soul: the hatred and ingratitude of men, the knowledge that for so many His Blood would be spilt in vain: the punishment which man's sin deserves from God: the displeasure of the All-Holy against the infinite transgressions of the human race: all met at this moment upon the Head of our Redeeming Lord: the supporting grace of God was withdrawn from Him, and He cried out, as unable to sustain the heavy burden any longer: "My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

It has always been felt that this is one of the most appalling and mysterious moments in the Passion. Our Lord was pleased in these words to shew to men the secrets of His Heart. His Bodily sufferings were indisputable. We see here that His mental anguish was something unparalleled and untold.

His meat was to do the Will of His Father. In His Presence was His perpetual joy. "I am not alone" He had said, looking forward to the desertion of His disciples, "because the Father is with Me.[5]" But now, so far as His Human consciousness is concerned, the Father also had forsaken Him.

It was not of course, that the Divine Word, which was incarnate in the Humanity of Jesus Christ, was

[5] *S. John.* xvi. 32.

separated from that Infinite Mind of which He is the Wisdom and the Expression: or that the Spirit and Soul of Jesus were rent asunder from the Person of the Word, Who had assumed them: neither was God really displeased with His Son, Who was at that moment giving effect to His eternal purpose, to save mankind by His humiliation. But as by the grace of God He was "tasting death for everyman,"[6] He submitted to the very extremity of mental suffering. He subjected Himself to all possible distress. He drank to the dregs the cup which sinners have prepared for themselves: that bitter potion, by which, if they will, the poison of sin is most thoroughly expelled; and the soul, reduced to nothing, is thrown back wholly upon the Source of good.

He thus emptied Himself entirely of all created strength. He was brought into the very dust of death. He was made "perfect through sufferings."

And so afterwards that Human Nature was filled to overflowing with the might of God. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth."[7] "God hath therefore highly exalted Him and given Him a Name which is above every name."[8]

But before He received His Crown, He endured the

[6] *Heb.* ii. 9. [7] *S. Matt.* xxviii. 18. [8] *Phil.* ii. 9.

Cross. He knew what it was to feel the want of God; to experience the turning away of His Face. That is indeed worse than death. The dread of it, it would appear, gives death its terror. To be truly and indeed forsaken by God is Hell. But that can only be the portion of the wicked: of those that hate God. This however, no doubt, furnishes such basis of truth as there is for that assertion, which is not to be taken as strictly true, but which nevertheless deserves consideration; that our Lord suffered for us the torments of the damned. Of these, separation from God is the real cause.

And our Lord suffered the sense of such desertion. It seemed as if the word of His enemies were true, "God hath forsaken Him, persecute Him and take Him for there is none to deliver Him."[9]

But there was this essential difference. The pains of the wicked only intensify their hatred against the immutable justice that inflicts them. As in the Book of Revelation, "they blasphemed the God of heaven, which had power over these plagues, because of their pains and their sores."[10] But the servants of God turn to the hand that smites them.

[9] *Ps.* lxxi. 9. [10] *Rev.* xvi. 9. 11.

So it was with Job. Amongst many strong expressions of dissatisfaction with the course of God's Providence; notwithstanding vehement assertions of the undeserved nature of his sufferings, we find in his Book an undertone of unshaken confidence in the essential goodness and impartiality of His Maker. He appeals to the Almighty against Himself: thus shewing the strongest conviction that the cruelty and indifference, with which he seems to charge the Ruler of the world, were apparent only: and that though "Clouds and darkness are round about Him, yet righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne."[1] "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,"[2] is after all, the true expression of his inmost, deepest, mind. And as with the servant, so with his Master. In the midst of His desolation, and in His overwhelming pain, the Soul of Jesus turned to the Eternal Father: not indeed with the joyous confidence which had brightened it in happier days, "when the secret of God was upon His tabernacle:"[3] but with that strong yearning impulse, which survives when every other instinct is uprooted: the recourse of the creature to the Creator, of the finite life to the

[1] *Ps.* xcvii. 2. [2] *Job* xiii. 15. [3] *Job* xxix. 4.

self-existent Source, the Living God: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Even this bitter cry implies that there is still faith in a God who can hear, and who will hear in His own good time. It supposes the fundamental truth of that conclusion of the Psalmist, from his experience: "I have been young and now am old: and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken."[4]

Christ was bearing the sin of the world, and He was dealt with as a sinner, as the very embodiment of sin, so far as a truly holy Being could be. "He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin."[5] This was to Him anguish, such as we cannot conceive. Real separation from God is Hell. To feel as if He were cast off for ever was the bitterest ingredient in the cup of trembling which our Redeemer drained upon the Cross: yet at the bottom, in the inmost spring of thought and will, remained that anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast,[6] a filial fear, a rooted trust, a practical and unconquerable love of God. And so He poured out His complaints before Him, and shewed Him of His trouble.[7]

The Greek translators have inserted a definite prayer

[4] *Ps.* xxxvii. 25. [5] 2 *Cor.* v. 21. [6] *Heb.* vi. 19.
[7] *Ps.* cxlii. 2.

in the first verse of the Psalm which our Lord used which appears in our Prayer Books: "My God, My God, *look upon Me;* why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

But in the original, as in our Bible Version, and in our Lord's words in the the Gospels of S. Matthew and S. Mark, the direct petition is absent. The complaint only is expressed, the prayer which it conveys is unexpressed. But it is implied in the fact *of* calling upon God. Men pray because they believe that God can hear. They put their case in His hands, because they are certain that He is the best Judge.

Another point to notice about the words themselves is that they are given, not in Greek, like the rest of the Seven Sayings from the Cross; but in an Oriental Tongue. There is also a difference between S. Matthew and S. Mark. In S. Matthew we read, "Eli, Eli," which is the Hebrew of the twenty second Psalm: in S. Mark "Eloi, Eloi," which seems to be the Galilean pronunciation of the Syro-Chaldaic or vernacular dialect of our Lord's time and country. In both we have 'Sabachthani' instead of the Hebrew word. And to this 'Eloi' would correspond: so that probably S. Mark, in this, as in other cases, Talitha cumi, and Ephphatha,[8]

[8] *S. Mark* v. 41. vii. 34.

has preserved the exact syllables which came out of the mouth of Jesus.

It is curious also to observe that in the Greek translation, which both Evangelists subjoin, both the form of the vocative for God, and the order of the words which follow, is dissimilar: which seems to shew that these two Gospels, though they have so many points in common, must have been written independently.

Now to apply the thoughts which have been suggested by the contemplation of this most sacred Word.

"The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord."[9] If the Only-Begotten Son, being made "in the likeness of sinful flesh,"[1] thus "learned obedience by the things which He suffered,"[2] what are we that we should expect to find the service of God an easy progress?

The mystery of suffering is far older than the Gospel. We have it in the Book of Job, and in the Psalms: and a Greek Historian has preserved in a proverb the principle which the Epistle to the Hebrews applies to the Eternal Son Incarnate. "Sufferings are lessons."[3]

[9] *S. Matt.* x. 24. [1] *Ro.* viii. 3. [2] *Heb.* v. 8.
[3] *Herodotus* i. 207.

But more than that, apparent desertion by God is no proof of His real displeasure; but is a regular part of that discipline through which the greatest Saints, as well as the King of Saints Himself, have usually passed.

The lower degrees of this trial, dryness in prayer, dissatisfaction with their Religious state, doubt whether they have not altogether missed their way, seem to fall within the experience of all religious persons.

And there are darker and more mysterious phases of this spiritual eclipse. A dreary blank, reminding it of the threat "thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron,"[4] is frequently the only prospect of a faithful soul. The Lord hideth away His face and will not see: the light from heaven is stopped: Prayer seems to be unanswered, instruction and exhortation fall unheeded. Faith seems dead, and charity extinct. The waters are come in even unto our soul.[5] "All thy waves and storms are gone over me,"[6] we cry. Yet is the voice of wisdom and experience still "Why art thou cast down O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God."[7]

[4] *Deut.* xxviii. 23. [5] *Ps.* lxix. 1. [6] *Ps.* xlii. 9.
[7] *Ps.* xlii. 11. B. V.

He will not suffer the righteous to perish. He will not cast off for ever.[8] He will not reject the vilest sinner who makes the Blood of Christ his plea; but will in the end return to him, and make him glad with the joy of His countenance. The one thing needed is to persevere. To give no ear to the enemy, who would persuade us that our hope is vain.

This desolation is a severe trial: while at the same time, if it is borne as long as God pleases to inflict it, it is a most powerful medicine: purging the soul from self-love, driving it to rely wholly upon God: teaching it to seek Him and to serve Him, for His own sake alone, and not for the comforts of His grace: and making the soul thus purged a polished shaft in the hand of the most High; a chosen vessel to contain His Spirit; a bright mirror to reflect His purity; a harp-string tuned to heavenly music. In such souls the Lord takes up His abode.

But before they are fit for this He leads them by a way that they know not.

The essential condition on their part is that they should submit. To suffer inwardly as well as outwardly is the way to perfection: the way which Jesus Christ has trodden.

[8] *Lam.* iii. 31.

Pain, desolation, dread; all but despair, are natural attendants on this road: but beneath all, there is hope against hope.

In this discipline all attempts to find satisfaction in creatures are a mistake. All real impatience is a most dangerous fault.

Our Lord's last bitter cry is a proof that all sensible consolation, all conscious hope may be withdrawn, while God's favour is in no degree lost. Still at the bottom there is the hold on God; the falling back on Him, when all else is given up as powerless and worthless. "My God, My God," is the voice of the undying spirit: "why hast thou forsaken me"? the question of the overburdened breaking heart.

STANZA.

On the Cross, in desolation,
Jesus, reft of consolation,
Drains the awful cup of woe.
Shield me from the world's alluring;
Make me unto death enduring;
Rather than such love forego.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesu Christ, Son of the living God, Who when Thou wast made an offering for sin, and didst

out Thy Soul unto death, wast overwhelmed
the greatness of our guilt, and didst cry out,
God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"
eseech Thee that the hiding of Thy Face may
r drive us to despair, but that in all our afflictions
distresses, yea even though our sins have taken
hold upon us that we are not able to look up, we
yet trust in God, and crying unto Him may
igh Thee find mercy, and grace to help us in
y time of need: for Thou hast redeemed us unto
by Thy Blood: and to Thee with the Father and
Holy Ghost we ascribe all honour and glory now
for ever. Amen.

Fifth Word.

I THIRST.

✠

THE twenty second Psalm, (the opening of which forms the fourth of our Lord's Seven last words,) has a peculiar title, which many ancient writers connect with the substance of the fifth Word.

It is inscribed to the chief Musician, or Precentor, "upon the Hind of the morning." Now this is probably the name of a tune to which the Psalm was to be sung. But it naturally reminds us of the words of our Lord in the Psalm itself; "Many dogs are come about me."[1] The Soul of our Saviour was like a hunted hind; roused early in the morning by her merciless pursuers;

[1] *Ps.* xxii. 16.

and followed all the day with unwearying enmity: so that now in the evening it was exhausted and thirsty, and panted after the springs of God's lovingkindness and man's gratitude. But as He says in the other great Passion Psalm, the sixty ninth, "They gave me gall to eat; and when I was thirsty they gave me vinegar to to drink."

Moreover this title is supposed to be a poetical description of the rising sun; the eye of the morning, whose rays, which the Hebrews call horns, pierce through the shades of night. We may see in it the Sun of Righteousness; who as has been said before, was setting in Blood: but it was only to rise again to a more glorious day, on which "He came forth as a bridegroom out of His chamber; and rejoiced as a giant to run his course."[2]

This also is implied in the latter part of the Psalm. "I will declare Thy Name, (He says,) unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee."[3]

All through our Lord's Passion there are two distinct features to be observed: the utter abject misery which He was pleased to undergo; and the perfect dignity and composure with which He went

[2] *Ps.* xix. 5. [3] *Ps.* xxii. 22.

through it. Nowhere perhaps are these more conspicuous than in His fifth Word. A most terrible fact; and, as following upon that, a most natural impulse, as we should think, is represented as a deliberate fulfilment of a prophetic announcement: shewing us at once the mysterious sanctity of every syllable of the inspired Volume; and the calm settled purpose with which the Incarnate Word accomplished all the details of the Father's Will concerning Him. "Jesus knowing that all things (else) were now accomplished, that the scripture (which has been repeated already from the sixty ninth Psalm) might be accomplished: saith, "I thirst."[4]

Now in the first place, we may be quite sure that what our Saviour said was true. He did thirst. And that in the most intense degree. The causes of His thirst are not far to seek. It was about three in the afternoon, and He had never tasted, except of the wine mingled with myrrh, which He would not drink;[5] since His last Supper, the evening before. He had had no rest all the night. After the deep excitement of His last discourse to His disciples, and His great intercession to the Father,[6] He had gone forth to

[4] *S. John.* xix. 28. [5] *S. Mark.* xv. 23. *S. Matt.* xxvii. 34. [6] *S. John.* xiv—xvii.

Gethsemane, and there endured the mental Agony of that bitter struggle which had wrung from Him the Bloody Sweat.[7] He had then been seized, and hurried about from Annas to Caiaphas, and from Caiaphas into the Council; from the Council to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, from Herod back to Pilate. He had been forsaken, mocked, insulted, crowned with thorns and scourged. "The plowers plowed upon His Back, and made long furrows."[8] His Cross had been laid upon His shoulders: and He had sunk beneath the weight. He had then been nailed to it. The effusion of His Blood continued.

He had now been hanging in torments for something like six hours. Death was fast approaching. He describes His own condition in the Psalm, "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my gums."[9] To say that He was thirsty is to say nothing. He was consumed, agonized, with parching burning thirst.

It is recorded that on one occasion the troops of Alexander the Great, after a long dry march through the desert, were so consumed with thirst, that when they came to a river, (the river Oxus) many of them were choked, in their intense insatiable effort to satisfy

[7] *S. Luke.* xxii. 44. [8] *Ps.* cxxix. 3. [9] *Ps.* xxii. 15.

their raging appetite for water; and in this way Alexander lost more men than in any of his battles.[0]

The parched lips and dried up mouth of the dying are sometimes very piteous, and, if sensation remains, must be most painful.

Yet now, when our Lord had been suffering for hours from the extremity of this torture, He said nothing, except at the end, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled:" and that we might know another element in that cup of absolute and unmixed bitterness, which He drained for us, in one complete uninterrupted draught.

Thus the Lamb of God fulfilled the type of that Paschal Oblation, appointed in "that night to be much observed of all the children of Israel, in their generations," the night of their deliverance from Egypt. It was to be "roast with fire, not sodden at all with water:"[1] and so when He gave Himself to be our ransom, to deliver us from a bondage worse than Pharaoh's, the Lord was scorched with the heat of burning pain, without any alleviation. As a whole burnt-offering He was consumed upon the Altar of the Cross. And that we might know what He

[0] *Quintus Curtius.* vii. v. 15. [1] *Ex.* xii. 42. 9.

endured, when it was all but ended, He spoke the Word, 'I thirst.'

What agonies are summed up in this one word! Reflexion and experience alone can teach us some small part of what it represents.

There seems to be evidence that after protracted tortures and excessive loss of blood, the pain of thirst becomes so intense as to overpower all other sense of suffering: (the one cry of the wounded upon a field of battle is for water:) and this would appear to have been the physical condition to which our Lord was brought.

And what was it which brought Him to it? His thirst to complete the work of God. His thirst for the salvation of our souls. This it was which moved Him to enter upon His Life of toil. This sustained Him in all the dreadful agonies which closed His course. For love of man He emptied Himself of His Divine glory. He laid aside His Majesty. He hid His power. Though as God He could not change, yet by taking to Him man's Nature He entered into the world as weak and helpless; He exposed Himself to all the malice of the wicked: He allowed Himself to be hunted to death by the proud, the envious, the worldly, the cowardly, the base; by men who had

seen and hated both Him and His Father;[2] hounded on, as they were, by the unseen powers of evil, to whom they had sold themselves: and so His Thirst for human souls resulted in a thirst which was like that which represents the hopeless misery of the lost: to whom one drop of water is denied when it is asked.[3] Like Samson, our champion was sore athirst in his conflict with his foes.[4] But instead of finding a spring of water, He had only a little vinegar put to His lips. Fit emblem of the return men make for all His love! "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."[5] "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry"[6] of them that suffered wrong.

How He thirsted for their conversion, was shewn as He approached the city in His short-lived triumph; "meek and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass."[7] He wept and bewailed the wilful blindness of

[2] *S. John* xv. 24. [3] *S. Luke.* xvi. 24. [4] *Judges.* xv. 18, 19. [5] *S. John.* i. 11. [6] *Is* v. 1. 2. 7. [7] *Zech.* ix. 9.

His people, "Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes."[7] This was our Saviour's thirst. That men would let Him save their souls: that they would give themselves to Him, that He might restore them to God from whom they had fallen.

That He might bring them back to that fountain of living waters which they had forsaken: and give them access to that wellspring of joy which they had lost. And they would not. This was our Redeemer's cruel pain, His unslaked thirst. This was the aggravation of all His misery, which made it more than He could bear. And therefore He cried 'I thirst.' I thirst for righteousness in man. I thirst to see fulfilled in him the righteousness of God. I thirst for the conversion of the wicked; for the complete devotion of the redeemed; for the ardent love of souls for whom I have thirsted unto death.

The whole ocean of Deity could not quench His thirst; unless to it might be added those separate rills of life, which have sprung up from His fulness; each with its own character and history; but finding their only good, the true end of their being, in likeness

[7] *S. Luke* xix. 41. 42.

to Him and union with Him. He would absorb them all: not to annihilate, but to recruit them: to join them to the perennial spring: to cleanse them from pollution, to fill them with fresh streams of gladness: to turn their water into wine; to be in them a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. And they would not.

Therefore His unsatisfied desire consumed Him, and He cried out in His pangs, 'I thirst.' 'Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!'[8] The sorrow of fruitless toil and rejected love. "And He said I have laboured in vain; I have spent My strength for nought and in vain."[9] "The harvest is past the summer is ended and men are not saved."[1]

He thirsted for the glory of God in the recovery of man; in man's return, in man's gratitude; in all the fruits of grace and glory with which the Father was ready to adorn the returning prodigal: but man refused.

He thirsted, and thirsted in vain. They gave Him gall to eat, and when He was thirsty they gave Him vinegar to drink; the bitterness of departing from God, the sourness of perverted gifts, and obstinate continuance in a state of alienation. This was of all

[8] *Lam.* i. 12. [9] *Is.* xlix. 4. [1] *Jer.* viii. 20.

things most painful and disappointing to the soul of Jesus.

And even among His friends and followers how poor is the return He gets for all His labours! How is our offering soured by selfishness and cold indifference!

He thirsts, and we make no response. He calls and we come sullenly and slowly at His call.

God cannot suffer in Himself. But as Man He suffered all these agonies for man's salvation. He was grieved and wearied with the burden of our sins. He was saddened with our ingratitude. He groaned deeply over our incredulity. He thirsted for the success of His redeeming love: and He endured the mortification, the bitter heart-rending pain, of seeing all His efforts thrown away upon unnumbered souls.

And in all this He shewed to us the Mind of God. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But if man will not repent, the Will of God is crossed: His counsels are frustrated. The thirst of Christ is unquenched.

He still says to us, as He said to the woman of Samaria at the well, 'give me to drink.'[2] Let us seek to answer to His request. Let us not yield a grudg-

[2] *S. John* iv. 7.

ing or a careless obedience to His precepts. Let u not pass by His sufferings with indifference. Let u not treat the salvation of souls, or anything whic bears upon it, as a light matter. Remember ou Saviour's awful thirst. Behold Him forsaken of Go and rejected of men, yet patient under it all. Let u then learn to bear disappointment in our work. I often seems hard that with good intentions, an faithful efforts, we should have no better succes But think of Christ. We perhaps blame our own c other's management. But there could be no defect in His teaching: no want of judgment in His metho

He gave Himself with absolute devotion to th cause of God. His love to men was pure and thoroughl unselfish. Yet the end of all was that they crucifie Him, and mocked Him in His dying agonies. "It i enough for the disciple that he be as his Master an the servant as his Lord."[3] It is true that in the en "He shall see of the travail of His Soul and shall b satisfied."[4] But the result falls far short of our ide of a successful career. Let us then be prepared fo failure. Let us learn with S. Paul, to take pleasur in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecu tions, in distresses for Christ's sake; "for when w

[3] *S. Matt.* x. 25. [4] *Is.* liii. 2.

are weak then are we strong:" for thus saith our Lord Himself: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."[5]

STANZA.

As the lily flower declineth,
And for heavenly moisture pineth,
Withered by the noonday heat:
Jesus thirsts—Behold Him languish;
Bring Him tears of contrite anguish:
'Tis for these He doth entreat.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesu Christ, the Fountain of life, the eternal Solace of the Saints, Who when Thou wast brought into the dust of death wast consumed with drought; and, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, didst speak and say "I thirst;" whereby also Thou didst make known Thine unquenchable desire for the welfare and salvation of the souls of men; grant that we may always thirst for Thy love; that Thou mayest be wholly our's, and we may be wholly Thine; that Thou mayest see of the travail of Thy Soul and mayest be satisfied, and that none of Thy sufferings for us may be in vain; Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest now and for ever. Amen.

[5] *2 Cor.* xii. 10. 9.

Sixth Word.

IT IS FINISHED.

✠

THE Sixth of our Lord's last words is closely connected with the Fifth. For we read that "Jesus knowing that all things were now finished, (the word used by S. John is the same that our Lord spoke immediately after) that the Scripture might be perfectly fulfilled, saith 'I thirst.' And they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar He said, It is finished."[1]

To whom then was He speaking? and of what was He speaking? If we can answer these two questions, we shall have done something towards

[1] *S. John* xix. 28—30.

clearing up the sense of this most comprehensive, but least definite of our Lord's sayings on the cross.

Now to take the second question first. No doubt our Lord was speaking of the same things as the Evangelist, when he said, Jesus knowing that all things were by this time accomplished. *All things* were accomplished: that is, all things which the Father had given him to do; all things which He had come into the world to do before His Death: all things which it was necessary for Him to suffer for our Redemption: and so, all things which were written in the Law the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Him. All had an end, a full accomplishment, in the Life and Passion, and the Death of Jesus.

There was only one clause of the Psalm, "when I was thirsty they gave me vinegar to drink," remaining to be verified; and now that was added to the sum total of fulfilled prophecy; and all is finished. "The mystery of God is finished, as he hath declared to His servants the prophets."[2] This then is in some sense a cry of victory, the voice of triumph; an exclamation of perseverance crowned with satisfaction, of endurance ending in release.

Well may we therefore breathe a sigh of relief in

[2] *Rev.* x. 7.

concert with this word of Christ. The Passion is all but ended. Men and devils have done their worst. He has drunk of the cup of trembling, the cup of the Lord's fury and indignation against the sins of men, which was put into His hands. He has drunk the very dregs of it and wrung them out;[3] and it is finished.

When He entered upon His last conflict with the powers of darkness His spirit quivered. He sank upon the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass from Him.[4] His agony was so intense that He not only broke into a sweat on that cold night, but His anguish of soul was such that His Sweat was as it were great drops of Blood falling down to the ground.[5]

Now all that He feared had come upon Him: All that He foresaw had been accomplished. He had borne the load of human sin. He had endured the pains of guilt, the misery of desertion. Ingratitude, malice, the enmity of evil to good, the cruelty of wicked men, the pains of death, and the pains of parting, had all fixed their sharp stings within His soul. He had tasted all the bitterness which man, when he fell away

[3] *Is.* li. 17. 22. [4] *S. Mark.* xiv. 35. [5] *S. Luke* xxii. 44.

from God, prepared for himself; and it was finished. "He had poured out His Soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and bare the sin of many,"[6] "to make an end of sins, and to make reconcilation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness."[7] And it is finished. He had said in His great prayer of self-oblation, "Father I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do."[8]

His course of active Ministry was then already closed. His crowning sufferings were embraced in will, and were on the point of beginning in fact. And now they are all accomplished. There was nothing left for Him but to die. And that was nothing when the light of God's countenance was restored to Him. The period of His desolation was ended.

For a time the sorrows of death compassed Him: the pains of hell came about Him.[9] But that is finished. Now He sums up all at one glance, and offers to the Father His finished work: declaring with a loud voice that the ransom is paid, the reconciliation is effected: sin is atoned for; Satan vanquished: man rescued from his usurped dominion, and restored to

[6] *Is.* liii. 12. [7] *Dan.* ix. 24. [8] *S. John* xvii. 4.
[9] *Ps.* xviii. 3, 4.

the Sovereignty of his righteous Maker. The Rock is smitten. The fountain for sin and for uncleanness[0] is ready to burst forth. The Water and the Blood[1] are stored within the Saviour's side. Salvation is procured for sinners: the Kingdom of Heaven is as good as opened to all believers. All this is comprehended in this one word, "finished."

And as the subject of this saying is general, including all that Jesus our Lord had undertaken; so is it addressed to all concerned. And who is not concerned in Christ's Atonement? By which He gathered together all things in one, both which are in heaven and which are in earth.[2]

"Earth and stars and sky and ocean,
By that Flood from stain are freed."[3]

First then we may regard this word as addressed to the Eternal Father. The coeternal Son had said before "Lo! I come! In the Volume of the Book it is written of Me: (the Book of the Divine purposes, and the Book of declared decrees, that is, Holy Scripture:) that I should fulfil thy will, O my God. I am content to do it; yea Thy law is within My Heart."[4] Thus was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."[5]

[0] *Zech.* xiii. 1. [1] 1 *S. John* v. 6. [2] *Eph.* i. 10.
[3] *Lustra sex.* [4] *Ps.* xl. 9, 10. [5] *Rev.* xiii. 8.

But now all had been fulfilled in act. The eternal purpose had come to pass in time. And the Divine Word, acting by His Human mind and will and organization, presented before the uncreated Majesty His completed offering. "It is finished;" let it be accepted.

And the same word expressed the present state of feeling of the Incarnate Son. He had surveyed the field of Scripture, the revealed Mind of the Almighty Lord. All was fulfilled. He had set His face as a flint. He had carried His obedience unto death, even the death of the Cross. He looked back upon all He had gone through. His early hardships, His long obscurity; the dulness of His disciples, the ingratitude of those He healed; the growing enmity of the Rulers; the obstinate attachment of the generality to their own special sins and vanities and idols. He beheld the impenitence of Jerusalem, the blindness of His countrymen; the infatuation of mankind, in love with evil. He had preached and striven and prayed. He had yielded Himself a victim to their malice, a ransom for their souls. At last Judas had betrayed Him to His deadly enemies. They had bound Him, led Him away; sought for false witness against Him: condemned Him for His testimony to the Truth. They had preferred a murderer to the Prince of Life.

They had delivered Him into the hands of the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge and to crucify. All the torments of mind and body, which the Lord had summed up in those few words when He told His disciples of what should come upon Him,[6] had been gone through, one by one: all possible forms of suffering had been exhausted. "He looked for some to have pity upon Him but there was no man, neither found He any to comfort Him."[7] And now it was finished. "His soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler: the snare is broken and He is delivered."[8] It is time for Him "to flee away and be at rest."[9] Oh happy signal of release! The Saviour's woes are over.

What joyful tidings to the amazed inhabitants of Heaven, who veiled their faces before their agonized Creator! What a relief to His afflicted Mother: to the beloved disciple, and the faithful women, who had watched the ebbing strength, and the accumulating anguish of the dying Jesus. "It is finished." "At length the worst is o'er."

We know that the angels desire to look into the mysteries which are revealed unto the Church on earth.[1]

[6] *S. Luke.* xviii. 31—33. [7] *Ps.* lxix. 21. [8] *Ps.* cxxiv. 6. [9] *Ps.* lv. 6. [1] 1 *S. Pet.* i. 12. *Eph.* iii. 10.

And surely the mystery of the Passion, the Death of God in the flesh, must have been the most astonishing, the most perplexing part of all that course which they had witnessed with adoring awe; from the time that the Eternal Son, Whom from the first moment of their being they had worshipped in the Divine and infinite Essence, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, had manifested Himself on earth in Human Nature. To see Him completing His obedience by dying the death of the wicked, must have been a sight at which they quailed; while, if they knew its effects, they who rejoice over one sinner that repenteth must have burst out into fresh hymns of exulting praise, when the gate of repentance was thus opened to a lost and sinful world. The Sacrifice is finished. The flaming sword is quenched in the Blood of Jesus. Man is restored to the society of unfallen spirits.

And if they rejoiced, how must their adversaries, the hosts of rebel angels, have gnashed their teeth and wrung their hands (if we may thus attribute bodies to those unbodied intelligences) when they found the prey thus taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered.[1] "It is finished."

[1] *Is.* xlix. 24.

If "Heaven repeats that victor cry," then
"Groaning Hell makes wild reply."[2]

It is possible that at this moment the Devil first discovered his mistake in stirring up Judas and the rest of his agents to compass the death of the all-holy Lamb.

By yielding to the powers of darkness the Lord of life set free His brethren, as He is not ashamed to call them.[3] Death, the first-born of Hell, was robbed of his sting, and bound as a powerless prisoner at whom the children of God may mock.

"He on that prey forbidden flew,
And lost the prey that was his due."[4]

When all had been endured, the debt was paid, the victory was won. The strife was fierce and long. Christ's was no bloodless victory.

When the Son of God took up our cause, and entered the lists for us, His whole created Nature was strained to the uttermost. The last and direst struggle was with the last enemy which should be subdued: which was then virtually subdued, the king of terrors; as he is called in the Book of Job.[5] But "it is finished." Death is vanquished. For sin is atoned for: and "the

[2] *Aurora lucis.* [3] *Heb.* ii. 11. [4] *Lyra Messianica p.* 341.
[5] *Job* xviii. 14.

sting of death is sin."[6] A power is gained for man, by which he may overcome sin in himself; even as Jesus overcame it in its power and in effect upon the cross.

The perfect obedience of man's Representative is finished. The second Adam has prevailed. There is still grief and desolation in the hearts of His friends. Triumph is perhaps still uppermost in the breasts of His enemies. But the tide is just upon the turn. As soon as the Breath is out of His Body, the Centurion confesses "Certainly this was a righteous man."[1] "Truly He was, as He said, the Son of God."[2] And soon the purport of the prophetic Scripture is recognized: and it is allowed with love and gratitude that "thus it behoved Christ to suffer;"[3] and that "with His stripes we are healed".[4]

And now let us turn our thoughts upon ourselves. What do we learn from this word of our great Master? Above all things, perseverance. "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."[5] "Better, as Solomon says, is the end of a thing than the begin-

[6]1 *Cor.* xv. 56. [1]*S. Luke* xxiii. 47.
[2]*S. Matt.* xxvii. 54. [3]*S. Luke* xxiv. 46.
[4]*Is.* liii. 5. [5]*S. Matt.* xxiv. 13.

ning thereof;"[1] though the beginning is usually much more agreeable, and more promising than the end.

It is not those who begin well but those who end well, who receive the crown. And between the beginning and the ending of anything that is worth doing, there are almost always seasons of difficulty and discouragement, when we are sorely tempted to leave off; and so to forfeit the benefit of what we have done already, and the reward which is in store for faithful persevering service at the end.

Now when we are thus tempted to be weary in well doing there is no encouragement like the example of our Lord, no strength like that He gained for us upon the Cross, and which He will give to all those who make the Cross their study and their pattern. Let us then constantly fix the eye of our soul upon Christ crucified. Let us pray to Him to give us grace to hold on our way, in spite of its roughness, its dulness, and its dryness; remembering the road by which He went to Glory. And let us look forward to the end with hope.

"Be the day never so long,
At length it ringeth to Evensong."

[1] *Eccles.* vii. 8.

The time will come when we must say "It is finished." Whether 'it' will be satisfactory to look back upon or not, depends on the way we spend each moment as it flies.

Therefore "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,"[2] that when thy race is run, the work which thou shalt present before the face of the Most High may be as perfect as thy power can make it.

And so, in another sense, our wisdom is not to look to the end, but to the present. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."[3] If we will deal faithfully with each duty, each opportunity, as it presents itself, God will lead us safely to the end.

And at last we shall say with Jesus "It is finished." Life is over, our trial is at an end. He has triumphed, He has proved faithful to the last, and we are saved.

STANZA.

"It is finished," calm and glorious,
Jesus, from the strife victorious,
Hurls the foe triumphant down.
Ransomed one, thy fetters spurning,
From each evil way returning,
Take the Cross and win the Crown.

[2] *Eccles.* ix. 10. [3] *S. Matt.* vi. 34.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesu Christ, the First and the
Author and Finisher of our Faith, Who w
hadst accomplished all things that were
Thee, and hadst made perfect the Myste
Passion, didst say "It is finished:" give u
finish the work which Thou hast given us t
evermore to rest upon the merits of th
Sacrifice, by which Thou didst make rec
for iniquity, and didst bring in everlasting
ness; of which we beseech Thee to m
partakers, both in this world and in the
come; Who with the Father and the H
livest and reignest, One God, world wi
Amen.

Seventh Word.

FATHER, INTO THY HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT.

✠

"RIGHT dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."[1] But how much dearer was the Death of His Son! For He is the Fount of sanctity, the King of saints. From Him comes all their holiness: and through Him it is well-pleasing in the eyes of God. His Death was the most meritorious act of obedience ever performed; the one propitiatory Sacrifice, freely offered by the One Being who owed no service, who had no defects; who was in Himself incapable of becoming greater or better that He was.

And when He condescended to assume the limitations of our condition, He was still perfect in every

[1] *Ps.* cxvi. 13.

respect as regards the nature and condition which He had assumed. Perfect in Infancy, perfect in Childhood, perfect in Manhood: perfect in obedience, perfect in endurance: perfect in act, perfect in will: perfect in life, perfect in death. He fulfilled to perfection the purpose with which God made man. He answered in all things to His original design. He exemplified in actual fact the law of creation, the law of God for man.

Nothing could add to the complete excellence of His human character, even as nothing could be added to His original Divine perfection. Jesus, with His free will, gave perfect satisfaction to the Mind of God; and is therefore a perfect pattern to all other men. Beside this He endured all the evil (personal guilt only and its consequences being excepted) which sin had brought on man; and last of all He suffered the final penalty of sin, which is death. The sentence threatened against man at the beginning had been, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."[2] "The wages of sin is death:"[3] and so the Just One underwent the sinner's punishment. "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree." He "suffered

[2] *Gen.* ii. 17. [3] *Ro.* vi. 23.

for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."[4]

We have watched Him through the hours of His Passion, from the time that He first opened His mouth to make intercession for the transgressors, till now when He is ready to depart, and speaks for the last time. "The good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." No man (he had said) taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself."[5] And now the time was come for Him to do this. Therefore He cried with a great cry, and said "Father into thy hands I commend, I lay by, my spirit." And when He had said this, He expired; He breathed no more; but let His soul pass into the place of spirits, the region of the dead.

There were not wanting in the manner of His Death signs of that authority which He had asserted Himself to possess, power to lay down His own Life. The loud voice was not within the natural powers of an exhausted sufferer, dying from suffocation and the loss of blood. It seemed to shew that His life was "yet whole"[6] in Him. Moreover this giving up of

[4] 1 *S. Peter* ii. 24. iii. 18. [5] *S. John* x. 11. 18.
[6] 2 *Sam.* i. 9.

His soul into the hands of His Father had all the appearance of a deliberate voluntary act. He said what He was going to do, and did it. As S. Augustine says: "Which of us can go to sleep just when He pleases, as freely as Jesus died when He chose?"

This word was also an act of devotion.

Like the Fourth it is taken from a Psalm of David.[1]

In the Bible translation you will find 'commit' instead of 'commend': which, according to our modern use of words, seems to represent more exactly the original. It means, "I give it into Thy charge;" "I entrust it to Thy care." The word is a word of filial confidence. With it the Saviour breathed His last. He bowed His Head and gave up the ghost.

We should like to think of His last moments as full of peace and satisfaction. And it would appear, we may, so far as the conscious relation of His Soul to God is concerned. It is not now 'My God, My God,' but 'Father.' Not the cry of the created spirit out of the depths, to Him who cannot really be unjust, though clouds and darkness are round about Him, and He seems to turn away His Face: but the loving

[1] *Ps.* xxxi. 6. B. v. 5.

address of the Son to the Father, who, as He knows full well, heareth Him always.[8]

Yet we must not conceal from ourselves what appears to be the fact; that our Lord's death, from a physical point of view, was the effect of intense grief and overwrought feeling: that He died, in fact, of a broken heart. So He seems to tell us, both in the twenty second and in the sixty ninth Psalm. "My Heart in the midst of my Body is even like melting wax."[9] "Thy rebuke hath broken My Heart."[0] And physicians say that this is the natural explanation of the Water that followed the Blood, when the soldier pierced His Side with his spear.

It was so ordered, that when all things were accomplished, the earthen vessel, which had been overstrained by the atoning sufferings of the God-Man, gave way, when it was no longer wanted: and quivering with "the pang His Soul that freed," it burst. "The wheel was broken at the cistern." Then did the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit returned to God who gave it."[1]

Thus the Will of God in His Providence, concurred with the Will of Jesus, the true High Priest; so He

[8] *S. John* xi. 42. [9] *Ps.* xxii. 14. [0] *Ps.* lxix. 21.
[1] *Eccles.* xii. 6, 7.

"poured out His Soul unto death" by a voluntary and at the same time, a natural process. He was under no necessity. Yet He submitted to the law of death, which binds fallen man: and when the time was come to die, His human Will accepted the condition of a sinner: and in the tearing asunder of soul and body He committed the keeping of His Soul to the power and goodness of His Father in Heaven: knowing well that "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them."[2]

Soul and spirit are here used indifferently: for though in some connexions we ought to distinguish them; yet when we speak of man as surviving after death it seems to make no real difference which word we use. The Spirit, which our Lord laid down into the hands of the Father, went into Paradise, the happy resting place of souls departed; and to It came the soul of the penitent thief, when his tortures were at an end. Our Lord there preached by His Spirit to the spirits in prison:[3] and the princes of Hell trembled at His coming: for it was the Living God who thus visited them in His created Spirit, and it was impossible that the bands of death, which He had allowed them to put upon Him, could hold Him.[4] When He pleased,

[2] *Wisdom* iii. 1. [3] 1 *S. Peter* iii. 19. [4] *Acts* ii. 24.

like Samson, He awoke and shook Himself, and the cords of Hell were broken, "as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire."[5]

But it is not for us now to follow His departed Soul into the mysteries of that hidden world. The time will come when we must tread that path which no mortal eye hath seen. At present let us look at the example which He has set us, especially at the hour of death.

There have been times when the thoughts of Christians seemed to be all centred in death; and when they scarcely seemed to remember that they had a life to live, as well as a death to die. To 'Learn to die' seemed to be in their eyes the one business of their lengthening years. Now we seem to be affected by a reaction towards the other extreme: and death is scarcely allowed to enter into our view of life.

This must be a mistake. Death is a fact: and as a fact we should be prepared to face it. Nothing is more certain than death: unless it should be prevented by Christ's coming to judgment: nothing more uncertain than the time of death. It is therefore right that we should be constantly prepared.

A good life, it is true, is the best preparation for

[5] *Judges* xvi. 20. 9.

Death. But there is such a thing as being too much engrossed with life, even when it is most carefully ordered according to the Will of God. And for this the best cure is to keep the approach of Death ever before our eyes: to be ready to give up our soul, our life, and all our concerns and interests, into the hands of God, whenever He may be pleased to call for them. This is part of the example of our Saviour. We do not know, as He did, when all that is written of us, in the volume of God's purposes, shall be accomplished. But we may know when the time comes: as God is often pleased to give His servants warning: and all through we may remember that the work is not our's but God's.[6] We are not answerable for the result, only we must do our best: and so in the end we may commit ourselves and all our ways into God's hands, "as unto a faithful Creator".[7]

To do this perfectly when we come to die we ought to practise it while we live. Common as death is, we can only each of us die once, and, it has been truly said, we shall never have an opportunity of making good any fault or omission which may be found in our conduct at that trying moment.

It is then a good and holy practice, and one with

[6] 2 *Chron.* xx. 15. [7] 1 *S. Peter* iv. 19.

which you are all doubtless familiar, to go through a brief rehearsal of the mode in which we should wish to enter on our last sleep, every night, when we compose ourselves to rest.

After we have made peace, as we trust, with God, by a review of the day's events, by an act of penitence and a prayer for pardon, we should give up all to His Almighty disposal, and before we sink into that unconscious state, which is so near akin to death, commit ourselves, in our Lord's last words, into His holy keeping: "Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit": adding with the Psalmist, what our Lord alone could not say, at least in our sense: "for thou hast redeemed me O Lord thou God of truth."[8] And the spirit of these words should be the spirit of our daily lives.

Self-will is the bane of human happiness and of human goodness. It is the ruin of peace, the mainspring of dissension jealousies and discontent. It is nonsense to think that we are not liable to it; not guilty of it. Jesus Christ was the only Man who was entirely free from self-will. His life and death form the one perfect example of its total absence: and in our struggles to extirpate this root of bitterness we

[8] *Ps.* xxxi. 6.

must make His example the rule we follow, the model we propose to copy; the original which we strive, however imperfectly, to reproduce.

Now self-will and resignation of ourselves to God, are simply contraries. In our Lord's last words we see perfect resignation: if we want to see the workings of self-will we need only look carefully within.

But if we would be crucified with Christ we must mortify our self-will.

This however does not mean that we are to be listless and passive, doing everything as if it were a trouble; or not worth doing at all. God has both given us work to do, and faculties to do it with. And it is our duty to use those faculties to the utmost, and to the best advantage, for His glory. There is all the difference in the world between doing our utmost to secure our own ends, and doing our utmost to bring about those ends which we know or believe that God would have us work for. This difference is chiefly shewn in the way in which we take the actual results. The person who works for God is neither elated by success, nor cast down by failure. In either case the faithful soul commits herself and her doings to her Father.

So Jesus made a voluntary offering of the Death which He had allowed His enemies to inflict: just as throughout His Life, He had sought not to do His own Will, but the Will of Him that sent Him.

And this is the true preparation for death, to die to ourselves in life. To have no designs, no plans of our own: no by-ends, on which we have secretly set our hearts, but simply to make up our minds to do or suffer whatever may appear to be our duty, the cup which our Father hath given us to drink.

So then the one lesson which we may learn from all our Lord's last words is mortification, the crucifixion of the old man; not only of sinful tendencies and remains of evil, but of our own natural will: that so we may be able to say with the Apostle, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."[9]

Then when the journey is over, the conflict ended, the work accomplished, we shall willingly lay down our lives, and commit our souls into our Father's hands: certain that He will send His angel to shut the lions' mouths:[1] and that though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we shall fear no evil; for He will be with us, His rod and His staff will comfort us.[2]

[9] *Gal.* ii. 20. [1] *Dan.* vi. 22. [2] *Ps.* xxiii. 4.

However dark the lot of the Saints may have beer in life, even if as has sometimes happened, it has bee hard to distinguish their desolation, and apparent los of God's presence, from despair; yet at the last Hi Face has shone upon them.

You never heard or read of one whom we shoul have judged faithful in life being deserted in the hou of death. There may be great and terrible struggl before the end: but the end is peace. Surely this an encouragement to persevere.

It is worth any suffering, any self-renunciation life, to be able to say at the last with confidenc "Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit": wi the assurance that we shall find rest in Paradise, a a joyful resurrection in the last day, through t Death and Passion and Resurrection of our Lo Jesus Christ.

STANZA.

MIDNIGHT gloom hath veiled the heaven,
Earth is quaking, rocks are riven,
Nature mourns, convulsed, o'erthrown:
Man alone, whose guilty madness
Steeped a ruined world in sadness,
Bears a heart more hard than stone.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesu Christ, Who art the Resurrection and the Life, Who when the hour of thy death was come didst yield up Thy Soul into the hand of God, saying, 'Father into Thy hands I commend My Spirit:' and bowing Thy Head didst give up the Ghost; vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to take us now and ever into Thy holy keeping; and to receive our spirits in the hour of death, and to place us in Paradise among Thy Saints and Elect; that in the great and dreadful Day when Thou shalt come to judge the quick and the dead, we may be set at Thy right hand, and may be accounted worthy to hear those gracious words, "Come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" for Thy mercy, O Thou Saviour of our souls, Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest, one God world without end. Amen.

O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and precious Blood hast redeemed us; save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee O Lord.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me!
Body of Christ, save me!
Blood of Christ, inebriate me!

Water from the Side of Christ cleanse me!
Passion of Christ, strengthen me!
O good Jesu, hear me!
Within Thy Wounds hide me!
Suffer me not to be separated from Thee;
From the malicious enemy defend me;
In the hour of my death call me,
And place me near to Thee;
That with Thy Saints
I may praise Thee
To ages of ages. Amen.

The Glorious Passion of our Lord Jesus Cl
deliver us from sorrowful heaviness, and bring u
the joys of Paradise. Amen.